1: Ammar E, I-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

An oil-press was also started twenty years ago by a stranger from Kous, and he is still referred to as Koussy. At the beginning of every summer, the shop used to press oil from the locally grown sesame (simsim). Five years later the Omda (headman of the village) started another oil-press in competition, and this for some time gave rise to gossip concerning the Omda's prestige in competing with the stranger. But during the last war, as a result of rationing the oil, the flourishing undertakings closed, being unable to come up to the hygienic requirements of the regulations and the government controls.

Besides these specialized occupations there are two other occupations undertaken by families from the village, namely weaving and hair-cutting. The two families of weavers, with their old-fashioned looms, supply all the village women with their woollen cover (worn on going outside and also used as a blanket at night). They also weave the outer garments of the older generation of men (zabut), which they wear in winter, while the younger generation is gradually abandoning the homespun and woven wool for the factory-made cloth.[1]

For the last three generations these families of weavers and barbers have been carrying on with their occupations, as they possess no land. The same applies to two families of fishermen; one of these relies entirely on fishing, while the other follows it as a supplementary occupation to farming.

Midwifery, and undertaking, are also specialized pursuits which have been carried on in the same families for a long time. The same is true of the offices of the priest and of the Sheikh of the village school (Kuttab).

From such a survey it can be seen that the specialized occupations such as carpentry, milling, pottery, and shopkeeping have been introduced by outsiders, who, though performing an important function in the village economic life, have not been entirely accepted by the villagers as fully-fledged members of the community. Immediately one of the villagers themselves engages in any of these occupations, however, this particular occupation is brought into a more conscious level of evaluation. As long as strangers alone pursue a particular task or occupation, the villagers are indifferent to, or deprecate, the value-prestige of that job. Yet if another villager can show that the job is as paying and rewarding as farming, then other villagers may entertain the idea of competing with him. The reluctance to embark on anything but farming is partly due to the fact that the specialized jobs mentioned have been started by outsiders. Moreover, there is no scope for much specialization of occupations, as an appreciable amount of this is done by the various members of the household. Barter, milling, basket- and mat-making, and even a crude type of building is being carried on by every household. It is the landless people who can only gain their living by working as craftsmen or traders. It is true that, as the technical skill required for specialized occupations is transmitted through the kinship lines, it is not surprising to find that most of these jobs

[1] Women do the spinning for the cloth from the sheep's fleece.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

the winter crop or summer crop respectively. The villagers depend mainly on a kind of clay (nitrous soil) brought from the eastern cliffs as fertilizer, called 'marog'. On camel- or donkey-back it is brought to the fields after a journey of approximately six miles which takes about four hours there and back. The saline properties of 'marog' are recognized by colour and taste. In addition, pigeon and chicken droppings, soil impregnated with stable-dung, and oven-ashes are also used to supplement the 'marog'. Chemical fertilizers are used by only very few people who have neither animals nor children to bring the 'marog', or by those who have so much land for which they could not possibly collect all the required 'marog', and hence have to supplement it by chemical fertilizer. Chemical fertilizer is usually preferred to nitrous clay for the cultivation of cash crops, sugar-cane and cotton, the area of which does not exceed thirty acres for the whole village.

With the help of my informant, Ali, I have tried to calculate the amount of time needed for the entire process of cultivation of both the winter and summer crops. It is obvious that such a task is a somewhat complicated one. However, we took the feddan as the functional unit of measurement and had to assume certain criteria for the labour in the farm unit. We had to answer questions such as: How many hours does a farmer work in the field in a day or during different periods of work? To what extent is the difference in output affected by physical conditions? What tools, implements and animals do we assume to be owned by the farmer for our calculations? How many children are assumed to be working on the farm, and what age groups are represented? However, we agreed to take a family, composed of a father, having two children, aged eight and thirteen, owning a camel, and working on an acre as the basis of our calculations. This unit was not entirely arbitrary, as the average size of the family unit is between five and six persons. To include two boys in such a family is not beyond the law of probability. The age represents one child under compulsory schooling, helping his father in the afternoon, while the other boy has just left school on reaching adolescence, when he can be relied upon to bring the fertilizer from the hill. The camel has been chosen as the median unit for the animal contribution to the farm work. It is true that not every farmer owns a camel, but alternatively he might well have a donkey to bring fertilizer and a cow for ploughing. In this case, he could lend his cow for ploughing to a farmer having a camel, and ask him in return for his camel to help him bringing extra fertilizer. One farmer may possess a plough and a donkey, and thus he can get extra help in conveying fertilizer by lending his plough. If a farmer has a third boy he could send him to help in working with another farmer in return for some needed help. However, every farmer possesses a donkey or a camel for loading as a necessary productive agent in agriculture. Thus the writer feels that the unit chosen is a feasible productive unit, representing the average working conditions.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

Chapter Two

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY

SOCIAL GROUPINGS

By 'social organization' here is meant the relations between social groups which have a certain ordered arrangement in the community. This is usually called by most anthropologists 'social structure'. We shall deal not only with the expected or ideal pattern of relations between the groups or the individuals, but also with their realization in concrete social behaviour. As Malinowski has emphasized, one must not only consider the 'charter' of the institutions and their traditional norms governing human conduct; it is equally important to study the real activities which may differ from the prescribed expectations owing to specific social pressure.[1] Moreover, 'social organization' will also include the 'social controls' that maintain 'law and order in the community' as well as the religious and magical sanctions which serve to validate social action.

In Silwa, the family is the basic social unit around which the individual's life is centred. According to the official statistics, there are 1,223 families in Silwa Bahari, with an average of four persons to each family. In Arabic, the word family (aila) literally means the social unit that supports its members. In Silwa, the words for family and household (bait) are sometimes interchangeably used. Ideally, the minimum personnel of the family comprises parents, unmarried children and married sons with their wives. There are, however, many other variations on this pattern, e.g. a conjugal family with a son-in-law, with the husband's sister who is a widow, with the husband's paternal nephew or niece who is an orphan, or with a paternal cousin. One can safely say that the composition of the members of a household constituting a family is mainly determined by the patrilineal principle, an emphasis which lies at the root of the family in Silwa. The position of such a family depends on property and ownership of land, as it is the main factor that makes the family live in one household. A widowed sister lives with her married brother if she transfers to him her property of land or at least allows him to till it. As married boys can have no property

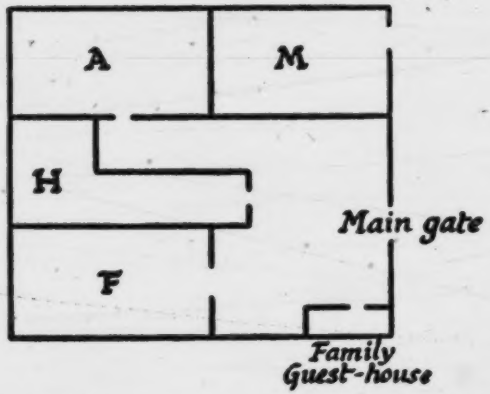
[1] B. Malinowski, *A Scientific Theory of Culture*, pp. 52–3.

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE COMMUNITY

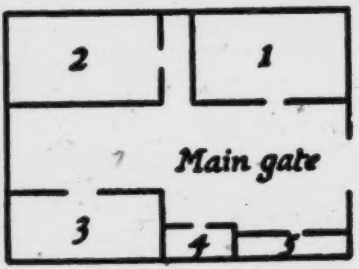
of their own as long as their father is alive, they have to live and work with him. Whether two married brothers with their families form one family living in one household, depends on whether they work co-operatively on the land after their father's death or whether they divide it. The family as an economic unit is identified with its common entrance to the house. This entrance must be distinguished from many houses which have a single main gate behind which there are other entrances. The main gate could be identified with the extended family whose members no longer form an economic unit.

The following sketch illustrates a typical example of a compound of an extended family.



X, the father of A, M and F and the grandfather of H, was the owner of this house site. After his death the two brothers M and A, their sister F and their nephew H wanted to divide their inheritance. During their prolonged quarrel over the land, they divided the house amongst them. As M was so annoyed with his brother A he decided not to enter the house from the same door A used, and built a separate entrance for himself. A, H and F, although constituting separate economic family units, still share the same main entrance and the compound is referred to as X's house.

The following household forms one economic unit in spite of the different members composing it.



1 represents the part of the head of the family with his unmarried children; 2 represents his mother and his widowed sister who have both transferred their land to the head of the family; 3 represents his half-sister, who is also a widow and has a young

1: Ammar E, 1-5 (1951) 1954
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Silwa

592 daughter; 4 his son and wife; 5 place reserved for animals. In this case, the half-sister has not transferred her share of land to her brother but rents it to him.

596 There is no institutionalized economic co-operation between the members of an extended family, if they are not living in one house. If they are on good terms, economic mututal assistance in borrowing money, animals, or crops may take place. Indeed it is significant that the extended family is not resorted to as much for economic help as has been expected. The economic strength of the extended family and the harmonious relationships between its members are not what is usually assumed by writers on social affairs in Egypt.[1]

However, the unity of the extended family is expected in questions related to public and formal occasions. The extended family is publicly responsible for the general conduct and certain disciplinary measures to redress the offences of its members against law and order, as we shall see later. Members of the extended family are also expected to render support to each other on occasions of offering hospitality, at circumcision, wedding [613] or funeral ceremonies. On the whole, the extended family could be regarded as an intermediate social unit between the conjugal economic family and the clan, shouldering the social responsibility for the smaller units and held accountable for their behaviour before the clan. It is only on the social level of public issues that public opinion in the village considers the family as a nucleus of blood relatives surrounded by a fringe of spouses.[2]

613 The extended families merge into the clan, and the village is composed
616 of nine clans (kabail), each tracing its descent in the patrilineal line to one common ancestor. Further, the nine clans are grouped in two main sections (hissa), each section belonging to a common progenitor, the two progenitors being brothers. One section is called 'Onab related to 'On, the brother of Mousa who is the progenitor of the Musiab section. The 'Onab section is divided into five clans, named: Diabab, Hasaballab, M'alliab, Waznab and Gharamab, whilst the Musiab is divided into four clans called: Marazik, 'Atamni, 'Amrab and Brahimab.[3]

616 It is locally accepted that each section represents half the population of the village, with the majority of the Musiab having their residence in the northern part, while the majority of the 'Onab reside mainly in the southern part. Between the two sections there is complete freedom of intermarriage

[1] The writer is under the impression, from his general observation, that the extended family seems to be stronger and more effective as an economic unit amongst big landowning families as distinct from what obtains in Silwa, a community of small landowners.

[2] Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man*, p. 159.

[3] Ab, the termination of the names of these clans, according to C. G. Seligman and Brenda Seligman, cannot be the Arabic ab—father. The suffix is common among the Beja tribal names. 'The Kababish, a Sudan Arab Tribe', *Harvard African Studies*, Vol. II, 1918, footnote, p. 113.

352 and toilet use there is a large flat tub (*tisht*) which serves
353 as both laundry-basin and bath, a fragment of mirror, and
296 a big wooden chest which may hold almost anything. This
515 was a gift at the betrothal, and its crude colours are reminders of a red-letter day. "In this chest near the oven, whose key the mistress of the house wears at her neck, I have seen all jumbled together eggs, pepper, cheese, rags, needles and thread, several necklaces and a packet of *kohl*." This from the letter of a surprised French missionary.

181 The close proximity of men, cattle and soil is as noticeable
356 in the fellah's house as in the field and the village. It is a reflection of the fellah's social level and manner of life. Like house, like household.

The fellah's dependence on soil, sun and water extends even to his house. He himself is of the earth, earthy, through his labour and his food, in his diseases and finally in his death. His house no less, by the material of which it is made — floor, walls, roof and all — and by its very squatness is a part of the earth.

342 The fellah lives out of doors because of the lack of
362 comfort in his home, which is no more than an unfurnished
181 sleeping-place and a store-room, a part of the crowded camp
183 which is the village.

All the houses are alike. The fellaheen have little individuality; each is an atomised unit of the mass, and his household but one cell in the agricultural hive. At the same time there is little or no space reserved for agricultural uses. The fellah works for others, and does not store the produce of the land for himself.

Yet this dwelling, which lacks so much that we deem essential, is so well adapted to its tenants and their habits that they will change or rather deform into its likeness any better-appointed house built for them on a model *'ezba*.

342 A house on an *'ezba* belongs to the owner, one in the
421 village to the fellah. House and site together are worth at the most L.E. 25. There is no rent or house tax to pay. On an *'ezba* the dwelling enters into the conditions of lease or share-tenancy. In the village it belongs to the head of the family.

592 In this homestead scarcely larger than himself the fellah leads a life of his own, no longer as a serf but as a master. Each house contains a large family, including very often, besides the father and mother, four or five children, a grand-

father or grandmother (who wields great authority), a married son, and some cousin or other on a prolonged visit. 592

When a fellah wishes to get married, if he is of age he deals directly with the girl's father and pays him the price. If he is young, that is less than eighteen, his mother will try to find him the ideal bride among her relations or neighbours, almost always in the same district. The girl will be fourteen or fifteen years of age, and by no means ignorant of the facts of life. The law of 1923, however, has fixed sixteen as the age of marriage (**). 584 [331] 582

The betrothal is celebrated by proxy in a contract of marriage (*'aqd*). The dowry (*mahr*) which the man must offer varies between L.E. 5 and L.E. 10. He pays two thirds down, and binds himself to pay the rest by a document drawn up by the *maazûn* or the *'omda*. 583 584

With this money the girl's parents go to the market-town to buy her trousseau, consisting of a red wedding-dress and gold bracelets (costing L.E. 1 or L.E. 2), and for furniture a water-jug, two copper cooking-pots (*halla*), a tub (*tisht*), a round table (*tablia*), and a brightly coloured chest cased in zinc. If the *mahr*, is large enough, they will also buy a mattress stuffed with cotton or straw, one or two pillows, and a quilted coverlet (*lihâf*).

On the wedding-day, that is to say the day the bride leaves her father's house to go to her husband's, all these things are loaded on to a camel hired for the occasion, and paraded round the village. The young girls go before and after, singing and clapping their hands, and the villagers admire the treasures as they pass. This takes place in the afternoon, and is followed by the departure of the bride. A crowd of women and children press into the room to see how she looks in her finery. The older women have bathed her the evening before, and her hands and feet have been reddened with henna. Her marriageable friends, in order to share her luck, have pinched her thighs. The procession can now begin. 585 [302] 789

The bride is hidden by red or white veils, and rides on a camel or in an old motorcar. Two or three women relatives go with her under the canopy. The men fire shots into the air (an Arab custom), while shrill tremolo cries (*zaghârit*) alternate with songs from the women. [152]

585 The bridegroom too has made himself ready. He
[515] has had a bath in his best friend's house. His best clothes have been brought, and the *mizayen* has come to groom him and put henna on his hands. Outside a crowd of people are waiting for him to come out. At last he is ready. His men friends ring him round with candles, and a torchlight procession begins. He holds a white handkerchief over his face as if to mask himself, as they strike up songs of love and pleasure (*mawâwîl*), which mingle with the sound of shots. Meanwhile the women throw pinches of salt over the men. When the family house is reached, the bridegroom's friends snatch him from the crowd and drag him in. The young bride is already waiting, surrounded by the women who have tested her virginity, and the marriage is consummated without much secrecy. In the street outside, amidst the cries of the crowd, singing and dancing goes on all night and all the next day. Coloured sweets and treacly pastries are
[262] handed round. On this day there is no thought of economy. After his marriage the young man spends a week or a fortnight without going to work, and during this time he is called "Prince" (*amîr*).

592 The household is thus begun, but for several years more
606 the couple will be dependent on the husband's family. If
554 the wife is clever, obeys her mother-in-law, and bears her
595 husband many male children, he will not take another wife. The same will happen if he is poor, and cannot afford the expenses of another wedding.

595 It is perfectly legal for a Moslem to have four wives, or
586 to divorce. But the fellah makes little use of this Koranic
178 liberty. In the last ten years a considerable decline has been noted in polygamy and divorce. The reason, according to a provincial official, is not so much the progress of civilisation as the increasing poverty of the fellaheen. Lower Egypt being richer, more bigamous marriages are recorded there than in Upper Egypt.

586 Divorce is carried out merely by repeating three times the words of repudiation (*talaq*). Nothing could be easier, but as he is obliged to pay maintenance to the divorced wife, and a new dowry to the one who takes her place, the fellah usually keeps to one wife. Other details also enter
162 into the matter. Statistics show that the country popula-
585 tion comprises almost as many men as women. For the whole